

Challenging Organisations and Society

reflective hybrids*

Different Cultures, Different Rhythms

Karin Lackner

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Karin Lackner

Editorial **Different Cultures, Different Rhythms**

In our increasingly globalized world, we experience different scenarios of intercultural environments. Economies are becoming more global. As a result, companies spread all over the world are becoming the norm rather than the exception. Employees are going abroad; others from abroad are intermixing in local organizations. Glopats arrange themselves with a nomadic lifestyle around the world.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) arrange support missions to manage intercultural teams and conduct field-work at on-site locations. Currently, such spontaneous support can be observed in the Philippines, where international agencies are desperately trying to collaborate post-Typhoon Haiyan.

To experience being intercultural, we no longer need to go far from home. The world of others is drifting into our society, partly assimilating, partly setting (purposeful) boundaries.

In any of the above scenarios, we discover this ambiguity - the coexistence of a well-preserved cultural identity and the intermixed variety of cultures in one newly established, global identity.

Nevertheless, there is a flow towards cultural interplays, which have become particularly noticeable in the growing urban environment around the globe. Global economic and societal growth has at least two opposite effects: 1) Cultures not only get closer to each other, they actually mingle. In many regions we find a mixed population of different cultural origins. At the same time, closing ranks evokes the need to distinguish one's own cultural background from others' cultural backgrounds. As a result, 2) separation of cultures is the second effect of globalization. We could even call it a *schismogenetic closeness* when people of different cultural backgrounds meet. And nowadays they

meet more often, more easily and more involuntarily. Intercultural management and consulting is confronted with these contradictory forces in various ways. Management is always the management of borders -- the here and the there, the inside and the outside, the past, the present and the future.

To act on the assumption that we are living and working in a global society, we approached intercultural issues from different angles in this issue of the COS Journal. There is a broad range of issues concerning different cultures and rhythms, ranging from theoretical discussions about global societies and religion to more concrete projects such as presenting successful initiatives in the consulting business. Each contribution illustrates a different way of approaching a certain topic and investigates different aspects of intercultural issues. It is the combination, the broader view of the issue, which has the potential to break new ground.

The articles in this journal represent the widespread field of cultural differences and inclusions. Thinking patterns from modern and pre-modern societies using examples from ethnological field studies will be compared and discussed, and eventually measured on their management practicalities.

With reference to organizations, culture has a multifaceted meaning. In an intercultural organizational environment, these different aspects of culture are highly entangled and mutually influence each other. The organization culture as a whole, the culture of each unit within the organization and their interplay make organizations unique and special. Confronted with different cultural backgrounds, organizations become pigmented by the host culture even though the organization itself does not change. Cultural differences surface in the way (e.g., functional) representatives deal with different interests partly originating from structural diversification, partly from basic anthropological differences: age, gender, death, ethnos, individualism and collectivism. These demographic diversities are aspects of a differentiation that occurs in all cultures. It's the way cultures deal with those disparities that makes the difference. Individuals are born into their cultural environment and are subjugated by pre-existing conditions; they have to survive and gain capacity to act

within their cultural imprint. We all see the world through our own cultural imprint and can only configure the self within the cultural frame of origin. Consequently, the relationship between the self and the social reality becomes salient, which, in a setting of diverse cultural origins, causes a multitude of problems and raises new questions.

The first article in this issue gives an overview of difficulties that arise when different cultures get entangled. Different cross-culture paces in organizations are achieved by the interplay of a variety of cultural aspects an organization has to deal with: the organization's tonality, the task related culture (e.g. production, sales etc.), the organization's policy concerning diversity. Some of the aspects of this overview are dealt with more thoroughly in the following articles by Krainz & Rabl, linking the organizational habitus to anthropological and ethnical aspects. The paper mainly deals with the less visible part of organizational and societal operations: with the spiritual world and its implication for management.

Another neglected cultural determinant is religion. The third article, by Ulrich Krainz, focuses on religion, the neglected cultural dimension and its impact on intercultural encounters. Eva Lauckner uncovers the complexity of cultural difficulties of German expatriates who are accompanying their partners on a business assignment in Syria when confronted with hospitality.

Furthermore, two empirical studies are presented. The first paper, by Hüseyin Özdemir & Mannie Sher, is a field study analyzing a joint venture undertaking of a German corporation in the People's Republic of China. This transdisciplinary project concludes that two related traditions, group relation action learning and organizational development, can be combined in order to promote organizational reflection, and individual and organizational change. The project also gives a good example of how theory and practice can be combined even in research. The second paper, by Christian Heinrich, is a qualitative empirical pre-study on telecoaching. The company under review has a global spread of departments, which makes one-on-one coaching sessions

hardly feasible. Results of this research pilot reveal advantages and disadvantages of telecoaching.

The articles in this issue introduce a valuable set of cultural differences and, thus, give a great insight into the broad dimensions of the topic. They illustrate the daily hazards with cultural boundaries and cultural amalgamation as well as the background forces that drive cultural imprints, like religion, indigenous backgrounds and cultural socialization.

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